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TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Second part of the nineteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 526th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 23 November 1979, at 7 p.m.

President: Mr. FARNON (New Zealand)

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The meeting was called to order at 7.10 p.m.

OPENING OF THE SECOND PART OF THE SESSION

1. The PRESIDENT declared open the second part of the nineteenth session of the Trade and Development Board.

INSTITUTIONAL, ORGANIZATIONAL, ADMINISTRATIVE AND RELATED MATTERS (agenda item 11) (continued)

(a) REVISION OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE BOARD AND ITS MAIN COMMITTEES (continued) (TD/B/L.542, TD/B/L.550)

2. The PRESIDENT recalled that, following the amendment by the General Assembly of its resolution 1995 (XIX) to the effect that the Board was normally to meet twice each year, the Board, at the first part of its nineteenth session, had amended rule 1 of its rules of procedure so as to reflect that change.

3. At its 525th meeting, the Board had decided, in conformity with rule 81 of its rules of procedure, to establish a working party of limited membership to consider the proposed amendments to rule 15, rule 19 and annex I, as set out in document TD/B/L.542, and report to the Board during the second part of its nineteenth session. The Board had also decided to adopt, at the second part of the session, a decision on its rules of procedure after having received the report of the Working Party.

4. The Working Party's report (TD/B/L.550) was currently before the Board. Since the membership of the Working Party had been representative of all regional groups and China, he hoped that the Board would be able to take a decision quickly on the recommendations made.

5. Mr. JAMET (Italy), speaking on behalf of Group B, said that Group B had proposed to the other regional groups that the Bureau of the Board should be maintained in office during two consecutive regular sessions, starting with the autumn session. The members of Group B, while regretting that the other groups had not found it possible to endorse that proposal, which had been advanced in the interests of efficiency, were nevertheless able to accept the solution recommended by the Working Party.

6. The PRESIDENT suggested that the Board should decide to adopt the amendments to its rules of procedure as proposed by the Working Party in document TD/B/L.550 and instruct the secretariat to incorporate them in the rules of procedure of the Trade and Development Board and annex I thereto.

7. It was so decided.

(b) REVIEW OF THE CALENDAR OF MEETINGS (continued) (TD/B/INF.92; TD/B/L.551 and Add.1)

8. The PRESIDENT reminded the Board that, at its 525th meeting, it had decided to consider during the second part of its nineteenth session the question of the convening by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD of meetings of experts on the interdependence of problems of trade, development finance and the international monetary system pursuant to its decision 144 (XVI). Furthermore, a number of matters concerning the calendar of meetings had arisen since the Board's last meeting. The amendments to the calendar of meetings for 1980 were to be found in document TD/B/L.551. He invited the Director of the Division for Programme Support Services to introduce the item.

9. Mr. BERTHOUD (Director, Division for Programme Support Services) introduced the note by the secretariat (TD/B/L.551). With regard to the issue of the interdependence of problems of trade, development finance and the international monetary system which the Board, in its decision 144 (XVI), had requested the Secretary-General of UNCTAD to keep under review with the assistance of high-level experts appointed by Governments as appropriate, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD would shortly be consulting the co-ordinators of the regional groups with a view to convening a group of experts from 11 to 13 February 1980. That meeting should therefore be added to the changes contained in TD/B/L.551.

10. Since the resumption of the United Nations Conference on an International Code of Conduct on the Transfer of Technology was subject to the approval of the General Assembly, a foot-note to that effect should be added to the relevant entry. Regarding the proposal to include a further session of the United Nations Conference on a Convention on International Multimodal Transport, the Chairman of the Conference, which was currently in session, had requested the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, in accordance with the decision which the Board had adopted at its tenth special session, to make provision for the Conference to resume early in 1980. Further, the co-ordinators of regional groups had requested the Secretary-General of UNCTAD to postpone the fourth session of the United Nations Negotiating Conference on a Common Fund under the Integrated Programme for Commodities to early 1980 and to make provision for a further session of the Interim Committee before the resumption of the Conference.

11. If the Board adopted all the proposals before it, the number of weeks of meetings it would have authorized for 1980 would total 97.

12. Mr. STEINBACHER (Administrative Service) introduced the statement of financial implications (TD/B/L.551/Add.1).

13. Mr. IVANOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), speaking on behalf of Group D, said that the calendar of meetings adopted by the Board at the first part of its nineteenth session had already been somewhat overloaded. Experience had shown that, when the calendar was overloaded, the secretariat did not ensure that documents were prepared in time; the work of meetings did not proceed efficiently enough; delegations did not have sufficient time to prepare themselves; and that generally, in the pursuit of quantity, quality was lost.

14. The Board was about to add a further number of meetings to those already planned for 1980. The growing volume of meetings would impose a strain and create a real threat that the meetings planned would be lacking in effectiveness. Group D, which attached great importance to increasing the efficiency of UNCTAD's work as a whole, considered that new meetings should be scheduled only if the secretariat were able to guarantee that the documentation would be prepared in time, as provided for in Conference resolution 111 (V), paragraph 10.

15. It considered further that the secretariat should submit to the Board, at its twentieth session, a statement on the status of the documentation, in accordance with resolution 114 (V), paragraph 10, for all the meetings planned.

16. Group D would be prepared to examine the possibility of postponing some meetings if they could not be properly serviced, from the first to the second half of 1980 or even from 1980 to 1981. What mattered was not the actual number of meetings in the calendar but the efficiency with which meetings were conducted.

17. Group D could agree to the rescheduling of the fourth session of the United Nations Negotiating Conference on a Common Fund under the Integrated Programme for Commodities to 9-11 April 1980, on the understanding that, at its twentieth session, the Board might reconsider the question of the duration of that Conference in the light of the results of the fourth session of the Interim Committee.

18. Mr. JAINI (Italy), speaking on behalf of Group D, said that his Group was able to accept the setting of dates for a meeting of high-level experts on the interdependence of problems of trade, development finance and the international monetary system on the basis of Board decision 144 (XVI). It assumed that, before invitations were issued to the meeting, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD would consult with interested regional groups on the subject of representation, in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 6 of Conference resolution 114 (V).

19. The PRESIDENT invited the Board to approve the amendments to the calendar of meetings (TD/B/INF.92) contained in the note by the secretariat (TD/B/L.691).

20. The amendments to the calendar of meetings were approved.

21. The calendar of meetings, as amended, was approved.

22. Mr. STRELE (United States of America) said that, since there was a consensus among the members of the Board that a meeting of high-level experts on interdependence should be held, his country was prepared to participate in such a meeting. However, in view of the fact that the negotiations on the subject at the first part of the current session of the Board had unfortunately proved unsuccessful, his delegation - which had actively participated in those negotiations - did not believe that the convening of such a meeting was appropriate as yet.

23. Board decision 144 (XVI), which his delegation had endorsed, provided that the experts should be appointed "as appropriate". Given the intervening extensive discussions and the lack of agreement among member States on the formation and mandate of a group on interdependence, both at UNCTAD V and during the first part of the nineteenth session of the Board, his delegation did not believe that convening such a meeting would serve the interests of the member States.

OTHER BUSINESS (agenda item 12) (continued)

Resolution adopted by the Interim Committee of the United Nations Negotiating Conference on a Common Fund under the Integrated Programme for Commodities (TD/IPC/CF/COMF/IC/3, TD/B/772)

24. The PRESIDENT said that the resolution adopted by the Interim Committee of the United Nations Negotiating Conference on a Common Fund under the Integrated Programme for Commodities (TD/IPC/CF/COMF/IC/3) requested the Board, at its current session,

to recommend to the General Assembly that appropriate arrangements be made to advance the necessary funds to finance the preparatory work required for bringing the Common Fund into operation, up to a total of $U.S. million.

25. The text of a statement made by the spokesman for Group D upon the adoption of that resolution was circulated in the meeting in the form in document TD/B/772.

26. The Interim Committee had not taken any decisions on the nature and extent of the preparatory work required for bringing the Common Fund into operation, decisions which would be taken by the Negotiating Conference itself at the time of adoption of the Articles of Agreement. The reason for making a recommendation to the General Assembly at the present stage was to ensure that resources could be made available once the Agreement had been adopted and the Conference had taken such decisions. Although such a recommendation could be made by the General Assembly at its present session, work would not be able to begin until after the General Assembly had considered the question at its thirty-fifth session at the end of 1980.

27. In the light of the above observations, he invited the Board to adopt the draft text on preparatory work for bringing the Common Fund into operation, which had been prepared by the secretariat and circulated informally.

28. Mr. IVASHEV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), speaking on behalf of Group D, said that, although the members of his Group had not stood in the way of the adoption of the resolution by the Interim Committee, they still maintained the position on that issue which they had formulated at the Interim Committee's closing meeting. He requested that the reservation expressed on that occasion should be reproduced in full in the report of the Trade and Development Board on the second part of its nineteenth session.

29. The PRESIDENT assured the representative of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics that that would be done.

30. The draft text on preparatory work for bringing the Common Fund into operation was adopted.

Servicing of UNCTAD meetings (TD/B/L.575)

31. The PRESIDENT invited the Board to consider the draft resolution on the servicing of UNCTAD meetings submitted by France and Spain on behalf of the States members of Group B (TD/B/L.575).

32. Mr. WESSEL (France), introducing the draft resolution, apologized for submitting it at rather a late stage in the proceedings. The facts of the matter were well known to all members of the Board. The difficulties encountered were linked to the intense work of activities in UNCTAD; the draft resolution should not be viewed, therefore, as implying any criticism of any part of the secretariat.

33. It had been brought to his attention that delegations whose working language was not English were not the only ones to encounter difficulties of the kind referred to in the draft resolution; accordingly, he proposed to revise the text of the draft resolution by inserting the words "in particular" before the words "by delegations" in the second line of the penultimate paragraph.

34. Mr. BERNARDEZ (Cuba), speaking on behalf of the Latin American Group, expressed support for the draft resolution.

35. Mr. RICHARDS (New Zealand) said that his delegation was fully in sympathy with the problems of those delegations which were obliged to work in languages other than their own. Unfortunately, the text of the draft resolution had been distributed too late for his delegation to seek instructions on the matter; he hoped, however, that the measures requested in the draft would be considered in the context of the Ad hoc Intergovernmental Committee on the Rationalization of UNCTAD's Machinery.

36. Mr. OLOWER-AGGREY (Ghana) said that, although he, too, had had insufficient time to consider the draft resolution, he believed that, in supporting it, he was voicing the views of a large number of members of the African group.

37. Mr. RAOELINA (Madagascar), having expressed his support for the draft resolution, said that the difficulties encountered by delegations whose working language was not English had an adverse effect on the principle of the universality of UNCTAD. The practice of conducting informal negotiating sessions in English only meant that some delegations were reluctant or indeed unwilling to participate in them.

38. The delay in the distribution of documents translated into all the working languages of UNCTAD was also prejudicial to the work of the organization. It was patently wrong that the delegations of developing countries, whose Governments had to make great efforts to pay their travel and subsistence allowances, should be penalized for not being English-speaking. The fact that the headquarters of UNCTAD was located at Geneva did not mean that it should be dependent upon the administrative services of another independent body. It was essential that all delegations should participate effectively in the work of UNCTAD, and appropriate facilities should be made available to that end.

39. The provisions of Conference resolution 114 (V) would remain a dead letter if, when the proposed Programme Budget was put before the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly, the opportunity was not taken to inform that Committee of the seriousness of the difficulties UNCTAD was encountering and to express the desire that it should be granted the necessary administrative autonomy with a view, in particular, to the strengthening of the language services.

40. In connexion with the UNCTAD Programme Budget for 1980-1981, he said that there was a discrepancy between the increase in the workload established by member States for the UNCTAD secretariat and the proposed Programme Budget, which provided for only a very limited number of new professional posts. If the Board had been consulted sufficiently in advance, it could have formulated proposals to meet the secretariat's real needs.

41. Mr. KOBAYASHI (Japan) said that his delegation, which experienced difficulties in using English for the purposes of its work in international organizations, shared the concerns which had prompted France and Spain to submit the draft resolution (TD/B/L.553). Nevertheless, it had some misgivings about the wording of the draft

resolution, which seemed to imply that the main reason for the current unsatisfactory situation was a lack of financial resources, an implication that might hamper the efforts being made to rationalize the Board's work. It would, however, not oppose the draft resolution, provided that the Board adopted it without prejudice to the efforts being made by the Ad hoc Intergovernmental Committee on the Rationalization of UNCTAD's machinery.

42. Mr. GILLIN (Australia) said that his delegation, which was very conscious of the problems of delegations that had to work in languages other than their own, believed that the draft resolution under consideration related to matters of long-term interest to everyone involved in United Nations conferences.

43. In view of the fact, however, that the draft resolution, which had ultimate financial implications and which, as the representative of Japan had pointed out, might affect the work of the Ad hoc Committee on Rationalization, had only recently been circulated, he had been unable to give it the full consideration that was required before he could join in a consensus on the subject.

44. Mr. STREET (United States of America) said that he, too, was unable to join in a consensus on the draft resolution, since his authorities and, in particular, those dealing with the difficult issues of languages and the budget in New York, had not yet had an opportunity to comment on the text and its implications. That procedural reservation should not, however, detract from the great importance which his delegation attached to the solution of the problems raised in the draft resolution, for it fully sympathized with those delegations for which English was not a working language.

45. It was also of the opinion that the draft resolution should have reflected the fact that the problem of the processing of documents and of UNCTAD's working methods must be dealt with by the Working Party of the Ad hoc Committee on Rationalization.

46. Mr. SAYAD (Qatar) said that the difficulties encountered by Arabic-speaking delegations as a result of the non-availability of documentation and interpretation in Arabic hampered their effective participation in negotiations in UNCTAD and, consequently, in the efforts being made to establish a new international economic order. His delegation therefore supported the draft resolution under consideration.

47. Mr. PARRISH (Canada) said that his delegation, which supported the draft resolution and its basic objective of improving the system of documentation, translation and interpretation, took the view that the question of securing improvements in those areas should be considered not only in New York, but also at Geneva. Its support of the draft resolution was therefore based on the assumption that, in the coming months, discussions would be held involving the member Governments of UNCTAD, the UNCTAD secretariat and the United Nations Office at Geneva. The logical forum for such discussions would be the Ad hoc Committee on Rationalization and, in particular, its Working Party, which should examine the issues of documentation, translation and interpretation as a matter of high priority and attempt to find alternative solutions, comparing their costs and, whenever possible, using redeployment of current resources to improve the services.

48. In that connexion, he thought that the problem to be solved was likely to prove as much a management as a financial one. If the Ad hoc Committee on Rationalization were to consider those issues at its second session, it could then make specific recommendations to the Board at its twentieth session for transmission to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

49. Mr. TUOMIOJA (Finland), speaking also on behalf of the delegations of Norway and Sweden, expressed support for the draft resolution. The fact that English was the working language of those delegations had been a clear advantage to them in negotiations where the documentation and interpretation provided in other languages had been inadequate. They fully understood the difficulties encountered in such negotiations by delegations whose working language was not English and, with a view to overcoming those difficulties, were prepared to join in a consensus on the draft resolution.

50. Mr. LI Chih-min (China) said that his delegation, which supported the draft resolution, was of the opinion that it was time to seek a solution to the problems which were raised in that resolution and which had been discussed frequently in the past. On the threshold of the 1980s, it was appropriate to ask the General Assembly to improve the existing situation in order to make UNCTAD's work more effective. Measures to that end should be adopted as soon as possible and should not await the outcome of the work of the Ad hoc Committee on Rationalization.

51. Mr. ZEDAN (Saudi Arabia) said that his delegation agreed with the view expressed by the representative of Qatar and fully supported the draft resolution.

52. Mr. SALIBA (Malta) said that his delegation, which also supported the draft resolution under consideration, was of the opinion that, while the issue of conference servicing was one that could be discussed by the Ad hoc Committee on Rationalization, it was one that also affected the translation services, which were not exclusively at the disposal of UNCTAD. The draft resolution might serve to bring to the attention of delegations in New York the need to ensure that the translation services at Geneva and at Headquarters were proportionate in size to the number of meetings held in the two centres.

53. Mr. DE LAICLESIA (Spain) said that his delegation had sponsored the draft resolution because it considered it necessary to find basic solutions to the serious problems at hand. That did not, however, mean that other practical and, perhaps, more immediate solutions to those problems should be abandoned. Although the Ad hoc Committee on Rationalization would undoubtedly devote attention to those problems, in accordance with its terms of reference, the draft resolution did not rule out the possibility of seeking other ways and means of finding basic solutions. His delegation was convinced that, on the basis of the consensus which seemed to have been reached in the Board, it would be possible to solve those problems and establish better communications between all States, in which connexion the question of languages was of vital importance.

54. Mr. GAYNOR (Ireland), speaking on behalf of the States members of the European Economic Community, in which at least six different languages were used, said that the Community was fully in favour of the draft resolution under consideration and would urge its adoption.

55. Mr. HESSEL (France) said that he fully agreed with the representatives of Canada and Japan that the adoption of the draft resolution would encourage the Board to continue to make every effort to rationalize and improve the effectiveness of its work. While understanding the misgivings expressed on account of the late submission of the draft resolution, he urged all members of the Board to join in the consensus on it.

56. Mr. SCHNEBLIN (Switzerland) said that his delegation fully supported the draft resolution and urged all delegations to join in the consensus on it so as to enable the Board to work as effectively as possible.

57. Mr. MOLCHAN (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), speaking on behalf of the members of Group D, said that they supported the draft resolution but considered that it had nothing to do with the UNCTAD budget and the report of the Working Party on the UNCTAD Programme Budget for the biennium 1980-1981. In paragraph 2 of the draft resolution, the words "on submitting the budget estimates concerning the UNCTAD secretariat" should therefore be deleted.

58. The adoption of the draft resolution must not be regarded as meaning that the problems existing in UNCTAD with regard to the distribution of documentation and its interpretation were essentially connected with matters relating to the servicing of conferences in the United Nations Office at Geneva. Nor should the resolution be regarded as replacing the provisions of Conference resolution 112 (V) which prescribed measures to curtail the frequency and length of the meetings of different organs of UNCTAD.

59. Group D considered that the problem of the distribution of documentation and of interpretation would be carefully examined as a separate item by the Ad Hoc Committee on Rationalization, which had been convened pursuant to resolution 112 (V) and had just begun its work. The draft resolution should not prejudge the outcome of the examination of the question by that Committee.

60. Mr. STOESS (United States of America) said that, although he did not object to the sentiment of the draft resolution and would be reluctant to have any reservation he might make on it imply that he did not take the problem seriously, he would have welcomed an opportunity to discuss some of the substantive difficulties to which the draft resolution gave rise and to which the representative of the Soviet Union had referred. More particularly, he was in no position to make comments on the words "to take all necessary steps" in paragraph 1 or on the words "on submitting the budget estimates concerning the UNCTAD secretariat" in paragraph 2 without first hearing the views of his colleagues in New York who were responsible for such matters.

61. Mr. GLEMM (Australia) said that, like the representative of the United States, he had some difficulties with the wording of the draft resolution, which he had not had any opportunity to discuss in depth. As he had previously stated, however, he had no objection to the general thrust of the text.

62. The PRESIDENT suggested that the Board might adopt the draft resolution by consensus, on the understanding that the comments and reservations made thereon would be duly reflected in the summary record of the meeting.

63. The draft resolution (TD/B/L.551) was adopted.

Report of the Working Party on the UNCTAD Programme Budget for the biennium 1980-1981 (TD/B(XIX)/WP/L.1 and Add. 1-4; TD/B/L.545)

64. Mr. CHIBRI (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), Chairman of the Working Party, said that the Working Party had held seven meeting, and had adopted its report (TD/B(XIX)/WP/L.2 and Add. 1-4; TD/B/L.545) at its closing meeting on 23 November 1979.

65. At its first meeting, the Working Party had, at the proposal of the Group of 77, agreed to replace Algeria by the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya as a member of the Working Party, subject to the approval of the Board.

66. The PRESIDENT said that, if there were no objection, he would take it that the Board agreed that the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya should replace Algeria as a member of the Working Party.

67. It was so agreed.

68. Mr. VOLKOV (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics), speaking on behalf of Group D, said that the Group reserved its position with regard to the increase in the proposed Programme Budget and that it reserved the right to take its definitive position on the proposed Programme Budget for the biennium 1980-1981 when it was discussed by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly.

69. The PRESIDENT suggested that the Board should take note of the report of the Working Party of the nineteenth meeting of the Board on the UNCTAD Programme Budget for the biennium 1980-1981 (TD/B(XIX)/WP/L. and Add. 1-4; TD/B/L.545).

70. It was so decided.

ADOPTION OF THE REPORT OF THE BOARD TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (agenda item 17) (continued) (TD/B/777)

71. The PRESIDENT suggested that the Board should adopt the draft report on the second part of the nineteenth session (TD/B/777), authorizing the rapporteur to complete it and include in it the report of the Working Party on the UNCTAD Programme Budget for the biennium 1980-1981 and the comments made thereon by the members of the Board, for submission to the General Assembly at its thirty-fourth session.

72. It was so decided.

CLOSURE OF THE SESSION

73. The PRESIDENT declared the session closed.

The meeting rose at 5.40 p.m.